

ARTURO MORALES CARRION

CHARACTER
IN THE
HISPANIC PRESENCE



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**Speech by Dr. Arturo Morales Carrión,
President of the University of Puerto Rico,
at the IMAGE Convention,
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May I say a few words of greetings in Spanish before discussing the main subject of my speech.

En primer lugar, mil gracias a todos los amigos de IMAGE por tan generosa invitación. Mis saludos especiales a los compatrio-

tas puertorriqueños que asisten a esta Convención y asimismo a los hermanos de ascendencia mexicana que conmemoran esta fecha histórica --el Cinco de Mayo-- en que se reafirmó la independencia de México. Es un gran honor para mí el que sea un puertorriqueño el que les hable en este día. ¡Ello es reflejo de la unidad de nuestros pueblos que predicó aquel Benemérito de las Américas que fue Benito Juárez!

I am deeply grateful to Gil Chavez and the friends from IMAGE for inviting me to speak at this convention, where I understand all the saints are marching in: San Antonio, San Diego, Santa Bárbara, San Francisco, Santa Fe ... escorted, of course, by Los Angeles! It is, therefore, very kind of you not to have forgotten San Juan Bautista, who, according to the history books, migrated as a patron saint to America, many years before the others came to México or to the Southwest. Since 1508 San Juan has watched over an island civilization which, in spite of its modernity, carries a distinct Hispanic imprint and finds in the Spanish language a powerful root of its identity.

And may I say a few words about San Antonio. I am really not a newcomer, as some of you know. Eighty miles away, a mere jaunt by Texas reckoning, is the University of Texas campus at Austin where I obtained my Master's degree in Latin American History and Government. Some of my best friends were from San Antonio, and whenever possible, I came here to feel the pulse of our tradition, to hear Spanish, and of course, to enjoy tacos and tortillas. The San Antonio spice is never forgotten! The San Antonio mission system is a joy for the memory!

Cities, real cities, are more than an agglomeration of buildings and streets. Real cities have that intangible trait: character. And, in my travels throughout the great continental expanse, I have observed that wherever the patron saints went with their mission style, they did a fine job in establishing and strengthening the indelible mood and character of their cities, of which San Antonio is such an outstanding example. San Antonio has experienced great growth and yet it has retained its original Hispanic-American character, the touch of old Mexico.

When we talk of character in the New World, in the real America, which stretches from Alaska to Patagonia with its isthmus and islands, which is not limited nor swallowed geographically by the United States, we have to talk of the Hispanic influence.

In referring to the term "Hispanic," which I personally prefer to "Latino" —after all, most of us could remember no more than a few elementary latin words— I should like to put forth the definition I used last September in a speech for National Hispanic Heritage Week.

The term "Hispanic " —I said— is, indeed a blend of many things. It has little to do with the color of the skin or the notion of race, no matter how haughty or feudal some Hispanics have been... A simple definition of the Hispanic could be: a person with the willingness to mix. And therefore, a person with a disposition to create new types of human relationships, new types of cultural forms, or develop new perceptions of man and reality." I added that those of us who can claim a "Hispanic" origin —using the term in its wider context—

should be proud of the fact that we have created a real melting pot wherever we have gone and that we are peoples of all colors and hues.

I am speaking, of course, not just of Spain, but something greater than Spain. I am speaking not only of Aboriginal America, but something that goes beyond Aboriginal America. I am speaking not only of the African ingredient, so present in the West Indies, but something stronger than the African influence.

I am talking of a blend which, if it is not associated with great wealth and power in the contemporary world, has produced character. Probably it has to do with the peasants' roots, with the old culture which Carlos Castañeda, the anthropologist, has found among the Yaquis, with a certain feeling for nature and man, and is, therefore, more than the privilege of the few, the birthright of the many.

Character makes for paradox, and we Hispanics are a contradictory human strain. We all live as if we were giving daily substance to Dylan Thomas's famous line: "Man is my metaphor." According to the sociologists, we have created as a social typology, the tough hombre and machismo. And yet our real symbol is the supreme individual, Don Quijote, the tilter at windmills and the redresser of wrongs.

But because we are so individualistic, we are prone to fighting among ourselves and avoiding concerted group action. A great Spanish writer of the late nineteenth century, Angel Ganivet, once observed that every Spaniard behaved as if he carried a passport

which said: "Este español está autorizado a hacer lo que le da la gana". (This Spaniard is authorized to do whatever he pleases). From watching how we behave sometimes and the quarrels and dissensions we have, I have come to the reluctant conclusion that this particular passport office has been kept quite busy. I am certain IMAGE will see to it that the office is closed!

We cry many times for unity, but we love fragmentation. If we look at a world map, we can well imagine how powerful the Hispanic nations could be, if they were to learn the lesson of unity. But -alas!- this has not been our recent heritage. I will confine myself, however, to observations regarding those of us who, from the island of Puerto Rico to San Diego, share a common citizenship and point to our great diversity and dispersion or awareness of what we are, of our problems, aspirations and perplexities, and what we could do if we were to join hands, as we are doing here at this Convention.

Not long ago, I read a very good speech by Louis Núñez, Deputy Staff Director to the U. S. Commission of Civil Rights. Núñez was referring to the thorny problem of appointments of Hispanics to top level positions under the new administration. "Can we say that there is one person in our community"--he asked-- "who is being considered for a top level position, who will not have as his chief critics other leaders of our community?.... This collective lack of group discipline, if it does not change, will continue to diminish our opportunities to top positions".

The penchant for personalismo and the joy of sniping at each other obscure the fact

that a rising tide is on the way. The emergence of the Hispanic strain is, demographically, a crucial trend in the future course of U. S. civilization, as it is a towering fact in the future evolution of New World history. It is affecting every walk of life, and particularly what cultural anthropologists may call the U. S. folk culture --from sports to music to tacos, and rice and beans. More than ever it is influencing the language and mores, and more than ever it is impinging on politics and corraling votes. Hispanics very definitely corralled the votes that helped Jimmy Carter to win the Presidency, and other candidates to win governorships in several states, seats in Congress, and many other elective offices. Last November's electoral outcome has an unquestionable Hispanic stamp.

A few days ago, on April 14, President Carter, in a speech before the Organization of American States, went beyond the past rhetoric to the new situation. "The United States," he said, "actually has the fourth largest Spanish-speaking population in the world. The novels we read, the music we hear, the sports we play --all reflect a growing consciousness of each other. These intellectual, social, cultural and educational exchanges will continue with or without government help..."

I respect and support very much your concern and effort regarding top government positions and the relative leverage they carry. The pressure you are bringing to bear is a pressure that should be maintained. But I would hate to see other groups and sectors in this country believing that Hispanics are just a bunch of job seekers who are claiming some political pay-offs. The job of politics is not simply to go after a political job. The job of

politics is not to manipulate the spoils system but to give a strong hand to enhancing the values of the democratic system, and among them, the value of equality of opportunity.

Whether political leaders from both parties like it or not, the Hispanic tide is a rising tide. It is irreversible. It is to the good of any party, in or out of power, to realize this and to prepare for it. For the influence of the Hispanic tide will continue to grow "with or without government help".

The whole range of human activities in this country should be opened to it, the whole range of international representation should be available to it, and not just some reserved positions. Hispanics should be considered for all kinds of positions in this country, whether in government, academia, the professions and business, and not just to placate voters but to help build a more tolerant and better U. S. civilization. They have more than a surname to contribute to that goal.

The Hispanic tide has ceased to be a quaint, picturesque element in the huge U. S. social canvas. It is moving inland from the geographical and cultural periphery. If my definition of the Hispanic is correct, then it can make vital contribution to breaking down ethnic barriers and obsolete prejudices and stereotypes, which for so long have plagued true social democracy in the United States.

I insist that the emerging Hispanic visibility should not be epidermal, but attitudinal and behavioral. It can bring a way of looking at society and a way of acting in soci-

ety which can substitute for the concept of minorities, the concept of cultural diversity. In a social order, where human values truly predominate, there should be no room for minorities. The respect for human intelligence and integrity is not a question of numbers --not a question of más o menos-- but a question of values. To talk about minorities is to talk of relative numbers. It is a concept somehow still linked to the old idea of segregation-- a remnant, on the mainland, of a preponderantly Anglo society, jealous of its privileges. To talk of cultural diversity, on the other hand, is to talk about the essential fact that human expression is enriched by individuality.

Majorities and minorities may belong to the shifting trends of politics in a democracy, to head counts in congressional halls. That is where they properly belong. But they do not belong to a social pattern and structure where each person has a right to the development of his or her potential. If there is any valid minority, is the minority of one: the individual. And he or she, in turn, should be, as Protágoras the Greek said a long time ago, "the measure of all things."

To get some of these ideas across --ideas so akin to what is best in the Hispanic view of life-- it is essential to learn to work together. They cannot be put across while an internal guerrilla operation is being conducted nor in a condition where access to educational opportunity is limited from New York to California.

May I end with a few words in Spanish which is my native tongue and that of many millions throughout the world, with the hope

that I'll be understood by you.

Amigos míos: los valores de la cultura hispanoamericana de que descendemos, en el hondo sentido en que la he descrito, se encuentran en ascendencia aquí y en otras partes. Nuestra preocupación es y debe ser la persona humana y no el color de la piel de la persona humana. Nuestro interés radica en aceptar y promover la diversidad cultural y estimularla en un mundo que nos convertiría —si lo dejamos— en un robot obediente a sus máquinas.

Cuando vayamos a la política, al gobierno, al taller, a la universidad, al comercio, mantengamos como divisa y lema de acción el respeto a la persona humana. Que por esa obra se nos conozca como herederos de una gran tradición, a veces maltratada por la historia; que esa sea nuestra real visibilidad que aún puede enseñar muchas cosas al hombre moderno.

Mil gracias de nuevo a todos por la gran oportunidad de estar con ustedes y mis votos fervientes a IMAGE de unión, unión y más unión, y imis respetos al Santo patrón de esta ciudad!

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